

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)



Public Roundtable on

“Schools First in Budgeting Amendment Act of 2021”
and
“Schools Full Budgeting Amendment Act of 2021”

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson

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Live via Zoom Video Conference Broadcast



Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and staff. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today on the DCPS Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) school budgets.

Today, I am eager to share more about our planned revisions to the school budget model and how it will support our key agency principles of transparency, equity, and stability. I am also prepared to discuss the two proposed bills regarding DCPS' school budgeting process.

Next Generation Budget Model

First, we are proud that DCPS provides more funding per student to schools than our peer districts, but we recognize that our current operating budget model can be both difficult to understand and unpredictable for many schools. Over two years ago, we began our engagement efforts to listen to feedback from principals, parents/guardians, and the community to understand how to improve our budgeting practices. We enlisted independent budget experts to help us develop revisions that follow best practices and put the needs of our students first. Our process was rooted in deep engagement. Between August and December of 2021, DCPS has had fourteen formal touchpoints with stakeholders, including principal office hours, convenings of the DCPS Principal Budget Task Force, the DCPS Budget Policy Committee, the Chancellor's Parent Advisory Board, Local School Advisory Team (LSAT) office hours, a community townhall, a budget public hearing, and two engagement roundtables specifically for students in middle and high school.

Our goal at the outset was to develop revisions to our model that ensure resources are aligned to the individual needs of our students and allow schools to provide important programs and offerings even when enrollments shift. While each school will benefit differently, the planned revisions to our budget model increase clarity and flexibility to school leaders and their communities so they can best serve their students and families.

The proposed revisions are based on three factors: enrollment, targeted student need, and year-over-year stability. Funds would be distributed to a school based on its student and staff counts, the needs of special student populations, and the goal to ensure stability during year-over-year enrollment transitions. Schools of all enrollment sizes and demographics would receive funding aligned to their student enrollment and level of need.

DCPS is committed to providing every student with a high-quality education and the resources needed to be successful. The planned revisions will help ensure resources are allocated to best serve the individual needs of the diverse community of students we serve. While some funds are marked for specific needs, the planned revisions provide more flexibility to school leaders since they know best what our students need.



Proposed Budget Bills

Council's proposed legislation would have a detrimental impact on school leaders' ability to budget effectively. DCPS principals and LSATS will receive initial school budgets in February. Legislation which makes substantial changes to the budgeting process could cause principals to be forced to re-create their school budgets after they've already completed a round of extensive budget development with their school communities, causing confusion and burdening schools with additional work at a time when schools are already working at full capacity to educate students and lead through the pandemic.

Further, the bills before us today would create significant challenges for our system's ability to operate effectively. For example, DCPS is required by our agreement with Washington Teachers Union to budget on average salaries. This allows school leaders to make hiring decisions solely based on the quality of the candidates rather than a budget bottom line. Legislation which requires the agency to budget on actual salaries will lead to the unintended consequence of discriminating against long-tenured staff.

Moreover, the bills before us would commit DCPS to spending increases without addressing equity issues in past budgeting practices, hindering our ability to invest strategically and sustainably towards student success. Required annual increases, as outlined in the "Schools First in Budgeting Act," would commit significant resources in perpetuity and would hamper DCPS' ability to target resources toward student need.

I want to be clear that DCPS' planned revisions will put the District on a stronger path to equity. We plan to ensure that funding for at-risk students is allocated directly to at-risk students as a grant allocation to schools. The planned revisions include additional student funding weights for students who are English Learners or who have special education needs, and two at-risk concentration weights to better support our school communities that serve the highest percentages of at-risk students. The Council's proposed bills would maintain past budgeting practices which we must improve upon.

DCPS has been working diligently with our community on a new budget model for the past two years. We are excited to move forward this year with the support of parents, students, staff, and community stakeholders who have worked alongside us. We are committed to ensuring resources are aligned to the individual needs of our students while allowing schools to provide important programs and offerings, even when enrollments shift. We also plan to provide increased clarity to school leaders and their communities that helps guide how they can best serve their students and families.

In these unprecedented times, schools need stability and support. We have a plan to transition our schools to a clear and transparent model that ensures greater equity and financial sustainability for our schools and students. We have developed additional resources to support our school leaders and LSATs in their budget planning efforts during this transition. We firmly believe the planned revisions will get DCPS closer to our vision of equity and excellence for all. We respectfully ask the Council to partner with us in this important endeavor and milestone for our schools and families.

